

ADDRESS
OF
J. WILSON GIBBES
OF COLUMBIA, S. C.
CLASS OF 1886
CAPTAIN OF "C" COMPANY

AT THE

HOME-COMING BANQUET OF CITADEL ALUMNI

HELD IN THE MESS-HALL OF THE NEW CITADEL

OCTOBER 25

1924

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ADDRESS

One of the points of the Epicurean philosophy was that a good meal afforded protection from fate. According to Sydney Smith:

Serenely full, the epicure would say:
Fate cannot harm me; I have dined today.

What a dinner this to remove one's doubts and fears! Now I don't have to ask some good apothecary to give me an ounce of civet to sweeten my imagination, for, as Oliver Wendell Holmes told the doctors, the theory of the banquet is that it crowns the temples with roses and warms the heart with wine, so that the lips may speak more freely and the ears listen more lovingly, and our better natures, brought into communion for a gladsome hour or two, may absorb and carry away the fragrance of friendship, mingled with the odor of the blossoms that breathe sweet through the festal circle.

True, we have no small beer, no nut-brown ale, no lowly Port or imperial Tokay, and I see "no cordial julep here that flames and dances in his crystal bounds," as the Eighteenth Amendment is said to have suppressed such cheering and classical accompaniments of good fellowship; but we claim every license to make this home-coming hour "o'erflow with joy and pleasure drown the brim." To borrow from King Henry the Fifth:

This day is called the feast of The Citadel:
He that outlives this day and comes safe home
Will stand a-tilt when this day is nam'd,
And rouse him at the name of Citadel.

We have not met, as the ancient Greeks were wont to do, to recite odes and tragedies; nor, like the Troubadours, to hold parliaments of love and poesy; nor for the discussion of politics or the advancement of science; but, in deep thankfulness to Almighty God, who has permitted them to mingle together again near that place sacred to so many memories of youth and learning, the sons of the Citadel return home today.

We come back hither from the rich experiences of life as a son returns to the household of his youth, with pulse stirred by fond emotions, and we lay aside the cares of business and the absorbing thoughts and ambitions that engross our daily lives, so that we may breathe a purer and serener air, as we refresh ourselves with inhalations of the old camaraderie, and surcharge our spirits with a nobler reach of vision.

We come, too, to present to our departed brothers an oblation of gratitude and respect, to inscribe their virtues on the urn which contains their ashes.

Such home-comings are also faithful pledges of the respect we bear to the memory of our ancestors and our cadet companions and of the tenderness with which we cherish the rising generation. "They introduce the sages and heroes of ages past to the notice and emulation of succeeding times; they are at once testimonials of our gratitude and schools of virtue to our children."

Tonight we are all first classmen and captains, members of the same happy family. This is the birthday feast for every one of us whose forehead has been sprinkled from the font inscribed "S. C. M. A." Where sits any one of the clan, "there is the head of the table."

It is my part to speak of the past—"The Citadel of the Eighties." Time limits me to some briefly stated facts and reminiscences.

As all of you know, the old Citadel Academy (occupied by United States troops for nearly 17 years after the Confederate War) was reopened on October 1, 1882, by an Act of the General Assembly of

that year; but I am wondering whether any of you can recall or have heard what a "hairbreadth 'scape" that measure had in the course of its passage; and I can think of no more pertinent or interesting matter to relate to you than the legislative history of the Bill.

Speaker John C. Sheppard—brother of Colonel Orlando Sheppard, the honored chairman of the Board of Visitors, whose absence tonight deprives us of a real treat—(*par nobile fratrum!*)—appointed a Special Committee on the Citadel Academy, consisting of George Johnstone of Newberry, Charles H. Simonton of Charleston, John C. Haskell of Columbia, E. B. Murray of Anderson and W. K. Blake of Spartanburg.

This Committee introduced the reopening Bill in the House of Representatives on December 13, 1881. On January 31, 1882, it came up on second reading, whereupon J. C. Wilson, of Spartanburg, moved to strike out the enacting words. This motion was tabled upon the motion of Dr. M. C. Taggart, of Greenwood, by a yea and nay vote of 51 to 45.

R. W. Simpson of Anderson, then moved to indefinitely postpone the Bill, which motion was lost by a vote of 47 yeas to 55 nays.

Upon the question, "Shall this Bill be engrossed and ordered to a third reading?" the yeas and nays were again taken, resulting in the House reversing itself by a vote of 50 for the Bill and 55 against it. Accordingly, on page 337 of the House Journal of 1881-82 appears this line:

"So the Bill was rejected."

This was on *Friday the 13th!* And it seemed to be *Black Friday* for the Citadel!

Fortunately the opponents of the Bill neglected to perfect their victory by applying what is known as the "clincher," that parliamentary device designed to "bury" a measure that has been *quasi*-“killed.” This gave the fighting minority another opportunity. Upon the following day Colonel Johnstone moved to reconsider the vote

whereby the Bill failed to be ordered to third reading. Colonel Simpson moved to table that motion, but evidently some good work had been done overnight by the friends of the Bill and the motion was lost by the decisive vote of 29 yeas to 75 nays.

It was "once more unto the breach" for Colonel Simpson, and he moved to strike out the enacting words, which motion was lost on another roll-call by a vote of 44 to 60, and the Bill then went to third reading.

On January 17 another strong effort to kill the Bill was made when F. F. Gary, of Abbeville, moved to recommit it. This was tabled by a yea and nay vote of 58 to 46, upon the motion of John H. Devereaux, of Charleston.

The Bill was then put upon its final passage, and was ordered to the Senate by a vote of 59 to 49, that being the seventh roll-call in the House.

Mr. Murray then applied the parliamentary clincher, while the friends of the Academy were in the majority, and the Bill accordingly passed over to the Senate, where its course was even more perilous.

On second reading a motion by Senator Harllee, of Marion, to recommit it was lost. Senator Callison, of Lexington, moved to strike out the enacting words and demanded a call of the roll. The result was something that is exceedingly rare in legislation—a tie vote, 15 to 15. *'This was also on Friday.'* Gen. John D. Kennedy of Camden, President of the Senate, was accordingly called upon, under the constitution, to cast the deciding vote, which he did against recommittal.

The opponents of the Bill then tried to weaken it with amendments. Senator Harllee moved to cut out the provision for current expenses, and Senator Callison moved to amend by appropriating \$33,000 to establish a branch school at each county seat. Both motions failed. The Bill was then ordered to third reading by another tie vote, President Kennedy again saving it.

The next day it barely passed third reading, the roll-call resulting in 16 votes for it and 15 against it.

Senator Beaty, who had previously voted against it, voted for it, but this new support was neutralized by Senator Fishburne's going over to the opposition. Senator Jeter, who had been absent during all previous voting, appeared on the scene and tipped the scales our way.

I do not know how this impresses you all, but, from an experience of 20 years in the legislature, I doubt if any measure ever had a closer shave than that Bill to re-establish the Citadel. In the first place, only some inadvertence on the part of its opponents, who had just shown a majority, allowed it to be resurrected in the House. Then, in the Senate came the tie-vote—something that hardly occurs once in several sessions. I know that it has not happened in the House more than three or four times in the last ten years.

Yesterday I told Assistant Clerk Fowles, of the Senate, about this, and he was greatly surprised and interested, stating that during the last six years there had been only two tie-votes in that body, one of which was cast last year by Brother E. B. Jackson (whom I do not see here tonight), who for two years has presided over the Senate, and who, I am glad to say, has been re—"sentenced" by the unanimous vote of the people to serve again.

An examination of the records shows that General Kennedy cast only one other vote during his term (the President of the Senate voting only in case of a tie), his second vote being to defeat a Bill to amend the General Stock Law by appropriating \$10,000 to build a fence on the boundary line separating Orangeburg and Barnwell counties from Charleston, Colleton, Beaufort and Hampton counties between the Santee and Savannah Rivers.

To cap it all, and to show that the careers of you and me trembled in the balance on that memorable day, if President Kennedy had been absent the Bill would have failed to pass, as President *Pro Tem.* Witherspoon is recorded as voting against it, and accordingly it would have been defeated by a vote of 15 to 14.

I am one of the 170 boys who passed through the old sallyport on October 2, 1882, when the Citadel's gates were reopened. Fifty-three of us finished the course, comprising a graduating class that held the record for number until 1922, when we were topped by one.

While I believe that any cadet who receives the diploma of the Citadel is well equipped to make a solid and helpful citizen, and has it in him to attain supremacy, I feel that you will permit me to say that time enough has elapsed to show that the graduates of the eighties have loomed large in the life and history of South Carolina, and have justified the rehabilitation of her Military Academy. Thinking of them, I feel that I may use the language of Thomas Gray: "Ah, tell them they are men!"

May I mention by name just two? Here sits one—"Ollie" Bond, whom the Class of '86 gave you for your president, called by us all the best all-round cadet and scholar of the class, whose scholarship, courtesy and character fit him alike to guide your councils and to grace your festivals.

And the other, "Ollie" Leland (there he is!), master-builder, whom the Class of '86 also furnished to erect the New Citadel. We love him and South Carolina is proud of him.

These cadets of the eighties!
They illustrate those beautiful lines of Edward Moore's in "The Happy Marriage":

Time still, as he flies, brings increase to their truth,
And gives to their minds what he steals from their youth.

To night, let us, children of this our common mother, look back to the days we passed in that still retreat, the drum and fife of which have murdered sleep for so many generations of drowsy adolescents. In order to give you a true picture of cadet life in those days, instead of relying upon faulty memory, I quote from a letter I wrote my mother on January 11, 1886:

What do you think of getting up at 6 o'clock, with the thermometer at 14 degrees, going into a courtyard where three sea gales concentrate their forces, and standing there without over-coats, hand down and eyes front, for several minutes? We have to be present at ten other roll-calls—one of them at 5:30 P. M., lasting about eight minutes. The last one is at 10 o'clock, and half an hour later I inspect the rooms in my company and see that all lights are out and everybody in bed.

This week I am orderly of my room and have to make a fire every morning, bring water from a distance of 175 feet, go down three flights of stairs for coal, sweep out the room, etc.

It is bitterly cold outside. I can hear the wind whistling with terrific force throughout the galleries. It is now 8 o'clock and I dread going to tattoo. Mr. White issued extra covering yesterday and I got almost a wagon-load. I slept under four comforts and two double horse-blankets last night. With the poet Thompson, I say: "Come, gentle Spring! ethereal Mildness! come."

In the eighties much time and attention were given to the drill, and it was more showy than now. The cadence was used and the entire company were trained to snap their guns into place as one man. We considered Sergeant J. T. Coleman of '86, who afterwards served as assistant professor at the Citadel for several years, the best drilled man who ever handled a gun. We proudly sent him to the New Orleans Exposition in 1885, and he came back winner of the gold medal over West Point's representative. There's "Cap" right over there!

Touching the military side (if you will pardon another personal letter), I quote from another one of my letters home, concerning the trip of the Citadel corps to the Chatham Artillery celebration in Savannah:

Military Dude Factory, May 11, 1886.

We left the Dude Factory (as Farmer Tillman has been pleased to call our abode) last Tuesday and were escorted from the Savannah depot by the Washington Light Infantry, of Charleston, you may be sure. At Camp Washington we pitched camp. The tents were 10 x 12, with board floors. There were five of us in

my tent, and one trunk held the goods and chattels for the quintette. For bed clothing we had one pillow, two sheets, one blanket and two comforts apiece. We stuck a bayonet in the floor and put a candle in the socket. With one blanket between us and the boards we slept the sleep of the tired, and dreamed of unbounded honors and hard tack.

Wednesday morning reveille at 5:30. After breakfast we sallied forth in our gray suits and shining brass buttons to capture Savannah and its fair girls. But to our great surprise we didn't capture anyone. For 24 hours after our arrival we were barely noticed. We were South Carolinias, and they don't stand a chance in Georgia.

At 6 p. m. the whole camp (some 5,000 men) were ordered out for dress parade. We marched in "columns of fours," four "dudes" abreast, another four behind, and so on. When we got into the arena the command "fours left, march," was given, thus bringing us, 108 strong, into a straight line perpendicular to the grand-stand. It was magnificently done—108 cadets marching abreast for a hundred yards and preserving an arrow-like line. It was then that the tide changed, and we captured the town.

The next morning we gave an exhibition drill with 24 men, the judges having refused, after our splendid performance of the day before, to let us compete for the prize of \$2,500. The people went into raptures over the drill, and from then we were the lions of the hour. Our reputation was made, and that afternoon when we gave a special dress parade the grand-stand of 25,000 persons and the various military organizations from all over the South went wild over our whole battalion "fixing bayonets" as one man.

Can you do it, Mr. Shean?

Thursday we participated in the parade and exercises commemorative of the unveiling of some tablets in honor of General Nathaniel Greene. The dust flew around us like hail, while the mud in some places where they watered the streets was a foot deep, and we had about five miles of it.

After the parade we marched as we were, dust and mud and all, to the city hall, where President Jefferson Davis held a reception for us, each one of us shaking the grand old gentleman's hand, and paying special attention to Winnie, the "Daughter of the Confederacy."

That night we went to a reception given to "C" company by our sponsor, Miss Virginia Fraser. She and the maids of honor had conspicuous seats during the drill, with the colors displayed near them by the color guard. The other sponsors were mere candles beside the sun-like beauty of ours. Miss Fraser is considered by many the loveliest young lady in Charleston. She certainly eclipsed anything I saw in Savannah. Our maids of honor were Misses Bissell and Legare, of Charleston, and Misses Heyward and Lamar, of Savannah, all sweet and pretty as pictures.

On Saturday reveille was at 5.30, and this military crowd over here heard the real thing when Sergeant Condon (with nine gold stripes on his arm, each one representing five years as a drummer in the U. S. Army) and old black Mitchell put on their fancy drum and fife music—"The Jaybird Died with the Whooping Cough," "The Dandy Corporal of the Police Force," "Roast Beef," "Peas on a Trencher," etc.

Not one of us but who loved them both! I know they are adding sweet strains to the music of the celestial band!

The trip was no picnic, and a good many of the boys are in the hospital—some sick, some only tired. Dr. Parker's discerning eyes can always tell which, so I suppose that Archie China, the hospital steward, got a good many of the regulation orders for the latter cases: "China, give him two number two's."

The trip has done the Academy an incalculable amount of good. Nine boys from Georgia have already applied for warrants of appointment for next session. The "Dude Factory" will certainly profit by the trip. People are wild in their praises and the General [Superintendent Johnston] says we have "covered ourselves with glory." We certainly could have roped in that \$2,500 if they had let us enter the contest. There was nothing there that could compare with us.

"The Citadel of the Eighties!" This morning I went on a pilgrimage to its tenantless halls and deserted cadet rooms, and as I gazed down the aisles of the past there came to my lips these lines of Longfellow's:

This is the place. Stand still my steed—
Let me review the scene,
And summon from the shadowy past
The forms that once have been.

The cement that knits thy walls is tempered with associations and memories that are stronger than the parts they bind together!

Once again I saw the old guard-room, on the wall of which there hung for over forty years that noble motto, "Duty is the sublimest word in the English language," which was placed there by Colonel John P. Thomas, then Superintendent, upon the reopening in 1882, illustrating the guiding principle of his own life and intended by him to emblazon the pathway and illumine the spirit of every cadet with that fine sentiment attributed to the immortal Lee.*

I located the old lamp-room, where the room orderlies carried their glass lamps every morning to have them trimmed and filled.

I looked in the four different rooms that I occupied, and I thought of room-mates who are no more. How many here tonight have mourned over those lost room-mates and chums of their cadet days! As I think of them, so many are the struggling memories and contending fancies that rush thick upon the heart that I hardly know whether I address myself to the "dim shadows and dusky reminiscences that have passed away or to the more palpable forms of the real presence."

Fellow graduates! Let us in spirit gather around the old Citadel and garnish the urns of those dear fellows with the garlands of brotherly affection, and, as we journey into the vast confines of the past, let us not dismiss with haste the visions which flash and sparkle across our sky, but brood on them and draw out of the past genuine life for the present hour.

Proud as we are that we are the sons of this Academy, well may we say, with Byron in "Childe Harold":

And be the Spartan's epitaph on me:
"Sparta hath many a worthier son than he".

*In a paper entitled "The Forged Letter of Gen. Robert E. Lee," read before the Virginia State Bar Association in 1915, Prof. Charles A. Graves, of the Law School of the University of Virginia, presents additional evidence tending to prove that General Lee did not write the "Duty" Sentence: "Duty, then, is the sublimest word in our language."

Coming down to practical matters, I call your attention to these suggestive statistics concerning the personnel of our General Assembly of 1923-24:

	House	Senate	Total
Carolina men.....	36	13	49
Citadel men.....	6	5	11
Clemson men.....	3	3	6

I want to tell you that the large number of men in the first case is not through chance, and I suggest that the legislative committee and President Bond unite in seeing that a larger number of selected Citadel graduates enter the races for both Houses each campaign year.

It is good to come here in the halls of the new and Greater Citadel and see on every side the proofs of stability, improvement and expansion, testifying to the wisdom and vision that dictated the plan of it. The New Citadel is indeed worthy of South Carolina. "Time's noblest offspring is the last!" "Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth!" Our day is come; we have been born again, and now we will live as the "up-holders and creators of our age."







